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SBA Resources ‘Go The Extra Mile’ To Assist Local Small Business

FAIRMONT - When Sue Henderson needed a location to conduct a computer class on embroidery and sewing, she placed a call to Nick Lambernedis at the U.S. Small Business Administrations Business Information Center (BIC) in Fairmont.

“I knew from attending various small business workshops and events at the BIC, it had the computer equipment and space I needed in order to teach my class,” said Henderson.

In fact, that workshop was probably indirectly responsible for putting her small business on the path to success.

“My business was and is based on the ability to demonstrate what our machines can do and train our customers as well as being required by the companies that supply the machines,” she continued. “I didn’t have a facility at the time where I could hold a large workshop and Nick was generous enough to let me use the BIC.”

“Sue had attended some of the small business workshops and was familiar with what we had at the BIC,” said Lambernedis. “I felt offering the use of the facility to her was instrumental to the growth of her business at the time.”

Sue began her business, appropriately named Sew Chic, in 1996 as an extension of her sewing hobby. She started the business with the severance pay she received from a large utility company that was downsizing.

“I’ve been sewing since the age of 14 and I thought this would be a way I could sew everyday,” she adds. “Boy was I wrong.”

After starting out in a leased area that was 180 square feet, she has moved to two different locations and is presently adding additional space to the existing facility which she purchased in October 2002..

“We have been growing at a phenomenal rate each year and it just about takes all my time to keep up with running the business let alone time to enjoy sewing,” said Henderson.

Henderson also utilized the services of the local SCORE Chapter, or Service Corps of Retired Executives, to get the business up and running.

“I worked closely with the late Mr. Carrol Curry and the late Mr. Clarence Wilson, who were with the Upper Monongahela Valley SCORE Chapter, to get my accounting system up and running,” said Henderson. “They were always good to stop in every so often to see how things were going.”

The business not only consists of selling top-of-the-line sewing machines, but conducting training classes for the customers on how to properly use them. She also maintains a large supply of fabric and sewing accessories in her shop located just off the Prickett's Fort exit in Fairmont.

"Sewing machines have come a long way since the days of our grandparents," she adds. "Now days, the machines are computerized with one even has its own web site for downloading free embroidery designs. Some of the machines can be updated by connecting to the internet. It's quite an amazing business."

Her employees are retirees and customers who enjoy sewing and want to help others learn about the joys and "stress relief" that it can bring.

"I need employees who really know the business as well as I do and can answer any questions the customers have," she adds. "I'm really fortunate to have top notch employees who can provide the 'personal touch' each customer deserves to have."

Many of her customers are from other states with even some from other countries.

"Our suppliers won't allow us to sell on the Internet or by mail order," said Henderson. "Most of my out-of-state customers use their 'Quilters Bible,' a book entitled 'The Quilters Travel Companion' to visit quilting shops to do their 'shop hopping'. You wouldn't believe how many people across the U.S and Canada sew and quilt as a hobby."

It's really quite a big business, and growing.

Through it all, she has discovered that customer service is by and large the most important key to running a business.

"If you don't have customers, then you can't have a business," concluded Henderson.

For additional information on the programs and services offered by the SBA and their resource partners, contact the West Virginia District Office at 1-800-767-8052 ext. 8 or by email at wvinfo@sba.gov. You can also visit our web site at www.sba.gov/wv.

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